

# **The Wild American West**

## **By Carl Mellor**

Lehi experienced many colorful incidents involving rail transient in addition to routine panhandling and garden looting. A large California group of “Coxey’s Industrial Army” under “General Carter” arrived in town in 1894 and were allowed to camp along Dry Creek at State Road. The unemployed men inspired by Jacob Coxey, were on their way to Washington D.C. a “petition in boots” demanded federal action to create jobs.

On 12 May, 1894 the group broke camp and stole a locomotive at Lehi Junction and proceeded to Provo, where law enforcement officials derailed the engine. Governor West called out the militia and deputy marshals, who arrested twenty-seven of the “industrials,” including Carter. On May 18, the General and nineteen of his followers were sent to the territorial prison for “stealing a railroad train.”

The Industrials were not the last railroad itinerants to cause trouble for Lehi. A local correspondent to the 05 September 1896 Deseret News noted that “the tramp nuisance is becoming most unbearable here”. He went onto explain a recent incident where twelve drunken tramps at the Junction kept people out of their beds until 12:30 a.m. watching their premises before police officers could get the rowdies to move on.

A short time before Christmas that same year, another group broke into the Northwest Branch (old third ward) chapel. The men “held high carnival” according to the Lehi correspondent in the 26 December 1896 Deseret News, “singing and playing upon the organ in tramp style” before blowing out the lights and leaving.

A group of tramps in the fall of 1897 retreated to a grove of trees on the present site of the Rodeo Grounds with a keg of beer. The engaging description in the 21 September 1897 Lehi Banner noted that the men...“began discussing the merits of John Barleycorn, and as their spirits rose, the discussion waxed hot and

the noise increased until it became a nuisance. About the time policeman Thomas arrived on the scene and arose to a point of order which the assembly was disposed to resist. He called in assistance and after tapping some of the more boisterous ones on the head they took eight of them off to jail.”

During the heat of the Spanish-American War two hoboes under the influence of Lehi Junction liquor staggered down First East. One of them, spying a red quarantine flag in front of the James M. Kirkham residence, removed the flag and tucked it in the bosom of his shirt where according to the newspaper account, “a lover generally keeps the picture of his sweetheart.” Arrested and brought before Justice John Woodhouse, the flag stealer explained, “Why, yer ’oner, I thought ‘twas a Spanish flag and it made me American blood bile ter see it wave.”